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Engel, William E., and Grant Williams, eds.
The Shakespearean Death Arts:* Hamlet *Among the Tombs.
Palgrave Shakespeare Studies. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022. Pp. xv, 346 + 6 b/w, 2 col. ill. ISBN 978-3-030-88489-5 (hardcover) US$159.99.

In this edited collection, William E. Engel and Grant Williams, the editors, begin by defining their terms: "This volume takes as its point of departure the assumption that 'the death arts' designates a historical category vital for understanding early modern social interaction and cultural production" (1). They use negative definition but also positive definition as in the following: "[O]ur engagement with the death arts seeks principally to acknowledge the enduring legacy of the medieval *ars moriendi*, which instructed the dying person (the *moriens*) and their family in how to prepare for a religiously auspicious passing—that is, a 'good death'" (1–2). In the introduction, Engel and Williams identify and contextualize "the Shakespearean death arts" (19). This background sets the framework for the various contributions.

Part 1, "Staging the Death Arts," examines aspects of death in various plays. Discussing Shakespeare's *ars moriendi,* Andrew D. McCarthy makes a number of perceptive points, including the following: "Shakespeare's use of the *ars moriendi* to structure *King Lear* becomes explicit as Lear's behavior—and much of the language that describes it—draws repeated attention to the sin of impatience, one of the final sins the dying Christian is cautioned against" (43), and, to end the essay, "perhaps the playwright's greatest achievement is that he taught—and continues to teach—his audiences how to die" (45). There is a moral and didactic element to Shakespeare's art. Brian J. Harries interprets the dead and corpses, begins and ends with the death and discovery of the historical Richard III, observing, for example: "In the anonymous play *Locrine,* and in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, surviving enemies of deceased figures frequently use a moment of remembrance not to denigrate a quondam adversary, but rather to recast them in a positive light" (50; see also 49, 62).

Looking at death and bodies in *2 Henry IV*, Eileen Sperry concentrates on that play "and Hal's misrecognition of his father's death in Act 4. In this moment, Shakespeare uses both the *tu fui* and the related language of the sovereign's two bodies to engage the play's concerns with lineage and continuity in the face of certain death" (69). In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Grant Williams explores exemplum, posterity, and the dramatic. He argues that Shakespeare shows more

interest in rhetorical "memorials," "such as Cleopatra's blazonic eulogy, than in physical ones" (86). Dorothy Todd examines tombs and rituals in *Pericles*. She observes: "The tomb that frames both the play and this chapter's interpretation of entombment in *Pericles* belongs to the medieval poet Gower, who functions as the play's choric figure" (114). That play's "performance of the early modern death arts," especially "the funereal rituals" connected "with entombment," reveals the power "to remember, memorialize, reanimate, and restore" (128).

Shakespeare also represents death across genres. Jessica Tooker is concerned with "how Othello implicates the interlocutors of the tragedy in an early modern death art involving empathetic performative language," refers "to this as 'thana-rhetoric,'" which "holds out the possibility of an erotic life force that gives death a run for its money in *Othello*" (133), and concludes that "*Othello* is a tragedy about the failure to believe in unconditional love" (148). Maggie Vinter also discusses this play. She observes: "Othello can characterize himself as both enemy and defender of Venice in the moment of death because he evokes a literary and artistic tradition of corpses who engage in social critique. In *memento mori*, the dead rise up to claim kinship with the living and remind them of their ends" (154). Vinter makes another suggestive point: "The dead speak and sing through *Othello* to register the characters' particular tragedies, and in doing so offer social commentary on the divides of race, class and gender out of which they emerge. But they also transform those particular tragedies into more general *memento mori*" (168). The death arts that Shakespeare stages yield particular and general images and elements.

Part 2, "*Hamlet* and the Death Arts," provides an in-depth exploration of what has come to be the best known or one of the best known of Shakespeare's plays, in which bodies pile up at the end of the play. Years ago, Harry Levin discussed questions in the play, and here Jonathan Baldo observes: "Questions in *Hamlet* pertain overwhelmingly to the past, not the present or future, a pattern broken by the gravedigger. Throughout the play, questions are deeply implicated in the play's exploration of both the ethics and pathology of memory" (193). Remembering the past and death are part of the Shakespearean art of death, Zackariah Long also makes some intriguing observations, for instance, considering "a death art that Hamlet practices in these soliloquies, that takes full advantage of the Renaissance playhouse's symbolic topography: his habit of rhetorically placing characters within different otherworldly locations, depending upon his judgments of them" (204). Long specifies: "This practice of sorting

characters into a cosmographic scheme is indebted to two different kinds of premodern theater: first, 'theatres of memory,' architectural schemes for the organization of knowledge modeled on the *theatrum mundi*; and, second, 'theatres of God's judgments,' topographically organized tours of the afterlife from visionary literature" (204). The theme of judgment is part of Long's analysis and conclusion: "If the art of living is to learn to die, then perhaps the art of judgment is learning to suspend judgment" (219).

Amanda K. Ruud discusses the connections among rhetoric, presence, and the lack of it, and representations of loss: "The power of rhetorical description to navigate a tension between absence and presence is intensely on display in *Hamlet*, and the play explicitly turns to descriptions, visions, and images as responses to loss" (224). She argues that descriptive rhetoric is, for Thomas Kyd's Hieronimo, a "trope for responding to loss" or "a death art" (237). According to Pamela Royston Macfie, "Ophelia's drowning performs a burial rite that counters her final interment in earth. Though this death by water might seem to parody Christian baptism, its images are steeped in elemental mystery" (241). Death has many dimensions, religious, mythological, literary, dramatic. Concerning *Hamlet*, Isabel Karremann discusses a Christian aspect, how to prepare for death, for the audience "as a lesson about both morality and mortality" and a frame of "the tradition of the *danse macabre*, in which human figures 'dance' with a figure of death, often without recognizing that their final moment has come, and who therefore die a sudden death, unprepared and unrepentant of their sins" (283). Michael Neill observes the middles and ends and says, "*Hamlet* is a play noticeably possessed by narrative yearnings, but ones that are repeatedly undone by its conflicted attitudes towards ending" (309), and says of its protagonist: "Hamlet, for all his graveyard mockery, shares the general concern with making a good end" (320). That end is hard.

The end and beyond the end, including Shakespeare's own, concerns Rory Loughnane in the afterword, where he also states: "The idea that the dead could still exert control over the living fascinated Shakespeare" (329). Moreover, Shakespeare represents the art of death and his work has lived and lived long after his last breath. The rest and unrest, words and silence this collection so aptly addresses.

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